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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 KINSHASA 000039

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 2020/02/26

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SUBJECT: Cabinet reshuffle announced February 20: Prime Minister is big winner in smaller cabinet; CNDP does not get a ministry

REF: KINSHASA 254; KINSHASA 252; KINSHASA 218

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REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

¶1. (C) Summary: Ending a long period of speculation about a cabinet reshuffle, President Kabila announced his new government late Friday, February 19 (ref C). The big winner was Prime Minister Adolphe Muzito who kept his position and received support when Kabila appointed trusted confidants to key economic positions. Another clear winner was presidential chief of staff Adolphe Lumanu who assumes the portfolio of Deputy Prime Minister of Interior and Security, as well as the Interior Ministry portfolio. The recently integrated Tutsi-led rebel force CNDP (National Congress for the Defense of the People) received no positions in the government, a big surprise as many observers believed the CNDP had a tacit agreement with Kabila to lay down its arms in return for CNDP inclusion in the next cabinet. This relatively minor reshuffle reflects Kabila's deliberative decision-making style and, suggests that he intends to maintain current coalition partners (PALU and UDEMO) as allies in the 2011 election campaign. End summary.

Trimming the government/Maintaining regional and political balance

¶2. (SBU) Rumors about an impending cabinet reshuffle have circulated throughout the DRC since mid-2009. In the late evening of February 19, President Kabila finally put those rumors to rest when he ordered a reorganization of his cabinet (ref C). The reshuffle trimmed the cabinet from 54 positions to 43, which, the GDRC alleges, will reduce state spending and simplify preparations for the 2011 elections. Kabila has seemingly hedged his bets for re-election by keeping all of the ruling coalition's components in the GDRC. Katanga and Bandundu Provinces have the most posts, with eight each. This balance roughly reflects Kabila's traditional strength in the east and Prime Minister Muzito's influence in the west (Note, the provincial breakdown, including the prime minister, the new presidential chief of staff and security advisor is: Katanga, 8; Bandundu, 8; North Kivu, 7; South Kivu, 3; Equateur, 6; East and West Kasai, 6; Orientale, 3; Maniema, 3; Bas Congo, 2. End note.)

¶3. (SBU) The Kinshasa press presented a predictable partisan insight on the reshuffle. Pro-government L'Avenir noted that the downsized cabinet was tasked with improving living conditions, implementing a zero-tolerance policy toward corruption, and reaching the completion point for the HIPC (Heavily Indebted Poor Countries) initiative. Both the independent Le Potentiel and pro-government L'Observateur opined that the downsizing of the

cabinet reflected a willingness to enhance the government's effectiveness and curb expenditures. However, not all analysts agreed that the reshuffle was a positive step. The moderately independent La Reference Plus called the reshuffle "a non-event," while pro-opposition La Tempete des Tropiques argued that recruiting "bland ministers" would not have any impact. A striking contrast was provided from pro-government Forum des As which commented that "the expected tsunami did not even produce the shadow of a storm."

Muzito stays in office and even strengthens his position

¶4. (SBU) The biggest winner in the reshuffle was Prime Minister Adolphe Muzito. Many observers had expected his departure from government but Muzito remained, apparently retained by Kabila to allow him to move forward with plans, which have generally been applauded by donors, to bring the DRC to HIPC completion point (ref A). He also appears to have convinced Kabila that his Unified Lumumbist Party (PALU) is an indispensable coalition partner for 2011 elections. As further evidence of Kabila's willingness to stick with Muzito, the new Ministers of Finance and Budget are trusted confidants of Muzito. The new Finance Minister, Matata Ponyo, is from Kabila's ruling party while Budget Minister Jean-Baptiste N'tahwa is from PALU. (Bio note: Ponya was the

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president of BCECO -- Central Office of Coordination -- a GDRC implementing agency created with World Bank assistance to coordinate international financial assistance for GDRC programs in the public enterprises, public administration, and population sectors. N'tahwa was previously the Secretary General of Budget. End bio note.)

¶5. (SBU) Another surprise was the retention of Francois Joseph Mobutu Nzanga, son of the late dictator Mobutu Sese Seko, in his position as Deputy Prime Minister. He was also made Minister of Employment, Labor, and Social Welfare. Unlike the previous cabinet in which Deputy Prime Ministers did not have ministerial positions, the new cabinet gives each DPM one ministry, a ploy that it made it possible to reduce the number of ministers. Mobutu's continued presence in the government is also a signal that Kabila does not intend to jettison Mobutu's party, the Union of Democratic Mobutuists (UDEMO) from the ruling coalition before the 2011 elections. (Note: UDEMO is not a major political force but its inclusion in Kabila's coalition is deemed important nonetheless because it symbolizes reconciliation between Mobutu's and Kabila's fathers, whose armies fought one another for decades. UDEMO is also one of the few parties based in the western Congo that supports Kabila. End note.)

¶6. (SBU) In yet another surprise, Adolphe Lumanu Lulenda, formerly Kabila's chief of staff, was promoted to the position of Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Interior, arguably the most important job in the new cabinet after the Prime Minister. This move surprised many observers because of Lumanu's status as someone without a political base. Lumanu is also embroiled in a scandal resulting from press reports he sexually assaulted the ambassador of Canada. Gustave Beya Siku replaces Lumanu as presidential chief of staff. A native of Lubumbashi, Beya was most recently the Vice Minister of Energy. A law professor at Kinshasa University, Beya has also served as legal advisor in several ministries, including Economy, Industry, Trade, and Agricultural and Rural Development. He is rumored to be close to National Assembly President Evariste Boshab, a staunch Kabila supporter.

Kasongo is out

17. (SBU) The departure of influential Vice-Minister of Mines Victor Kasongo surprised many observers, particularly within the international community. Kasongo's departure could impact, perhaps positively, U.S. investor Freeport-McMoRan's ongoing negotiations with the GDRC on its mining concession, the only contract still under negotiation under the GDRC's review of sixty-one mining contracts initiated in 2007. A credible rumor has it that Kasongo, who is reportedly Kabila's cousin, ran afoul of Augustin Katumba, a close Kabila advisor, because of meddling in the contract dispute negotiations. (Note: We understand that Kasongo has not been abandoned in the political wilderness but will soon become the head of a parastatal enterprise. End note.)

Biggest loser: the CNDP

18. (SBU) The biggest surprise of the reshuffle is that neither the National Congress for the Defense of the People (CNDP - a Tutsi-led rebel group) nor any other former armed group received any posts in the government reshuffle, despite an understanding by many in the CNDP that Kabila had given tacit assurances he would reward the militia for its decision to lay down arms by naming CNDP members to the next government. In effect, in a February 22 press conference, Philippe Gafishi, President of the CNDP, claimed the new cabinet configuration did not comply with the March 23 peace accords. He softened his displeasure by stating that the CNDP would not resume fighting in spite of their lack of a ministerial post. The CNDP was not the only armed group upset by the cabinet reshuffle. Didier Bitaki, leader of the Mai Mai Kifufua group,

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threatened to take up arms again if they did not receive representation in the government. Information Minister Lambert Mende rejected the statement as blackmail, adding that the only legitimate way to gain a seat in the cabinet was by forming a valid political party and joining a coalition. He further pointed out that the CNDP has gained positions in provincial governments and was therefore not completely shut out of government. (Note: Bitaki's reaction to the new cabinet is classic Congolese political theater. Even though the national armed forces have little real military capacity, it is unlikely any armed group except the CNDP would be willing to resume fighting on a pretext so minor as a failure to receive ministerial appointments for its members. End note.)

19. (C) Some observers speculated that the absence of CNDP members in the new cabinet revealed the indifference of the Rwandan government in ensuring that Tutsi brethren in the Congo were taken care of. In fact, rumors have circulated that Kabila vetted his new cabinet with the Rwandans but this has not been confirmed. Regardless, Kabila clearly feels no need to reward the CNDP at this time and in fact may want to signal to members of the former rebel movement that he is displeased over some CNDP soldiers' misconduct after recently integrating into the Congolese armed forces (FARDC).

Other changes

10. (SBU) Other important changes include the promotion of Cesar Lubamba, previously Vice-Minister of Finance and now Minister of Urban Planning and Habitat. Ferdinand Kambere received a lateral promotion from Minister of Labor to Minister of Social Affairs. The new Minister of Health, Victor Makwenge Kaput, previously held the same position prior to the October 2008 government reshuffle.

It is uncertain whether this will be a positive development for the health sector as he is the subject of many allegations of corruption. The Ministry of Justice absorbed the Ministry of Human Rights, although there is speculation that a new State Secretary for Human Rights may be created. (Comment: This move should elevate the issues of human rights to a more powerful ministry, hopefully leading to a more significant engagement on the part of the government. On the other hand, the NGO community has already protested the change, citing the Minister of Justice's apparent unwillingness to work with civil society. End comment.) The Vice-Minister of Defense, one of the least known individuals in the previous cabinet, was removed.

11. (C) Comment: Overall changes between the old cabinet and the new are few in number, suggesting Kabila will look to form a broad coalition for the 2011 elections. The long wait for the reshuffle and the seemingly minor changes reflect Kabila's deliberate and cautious approach to politics. Overall, the new economic team, under the direction of Muzito, appears well placed to continue the effort towards the HIPC completion point. The absence of the CNDP in the government may be more of a non-event, despite its vociferous complaining (ref B). The CNDP holds important political, military, and economic positions in North Kivu, where its interests in power dynamics lie. We therefore do not expect the CNDP to do more than verbally protest their exclusion from government. End comment.
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